

# TIPS for EE PRACTITIONERS\*

## BASED ON A REVIEW OF ENVIRONMENTAL LITERACY RESEARCH

Environmental education practitioners now have some useful information about the state of environmental literacy in the United States. In the newly released, “Environmental Literacy in the United States,” Drs. Trudi Volk and Bill McBeth studied a number of research papers to determine the level of environmental literacy nationwide. The paper was funded by the U.S. EPA’s Office of Environmental Education as part of the Environmental Education and Training Partnership.

When we think about the meaning of literacy, one of the first things we might think about is how well we can read and write. But we can think about literacy in other ways, too. Professors Volk of Southern Illinois University at Carbondale and McBeth of the University of Wisconsin in Platteville sought to determine if any gaps existed between what would be the ideal environmental literacy and the current state of students’ knowledge about the environment. The studies they reviewed revealed what was not studied by researchers. They found that:

- Less than half of the studies measured environmentally responsible behavior, ecological knowledge, or socio-political knowledge.
- None of the studies they reviewed measured cognitive skills related to environmental literacy or any other determinants of environmentally responsible behavior.

As a result of their study Volk and McBeth reported that the instruction students received in environmental education was not as good as it could be, and that the low level of environmental literacy was a result of the way students were taught. Here are some of the recommendations they made to improve the level of environmental literacy:

- Rely more on theory and research to guide educational practices rather than intuition.
- Consider instruction that develops students’ cognitive skills and socio-political understandings.
- Develop students’ ecological and environmental issue knowledge.
- Encourage responsible environmental behavior.
- Construct instruction that is “logically developed and meaningfully sequenced.”

In conclusion, they stressed that their study was a first step toward determining the state of environmental literacy. They recommended that a baseline measure of the literacy components needed to be made and that it should be from several populations so that comparisons could be made between populations over time. For further research, they recommended that:

- A holistic assessment of environmental literacy should be made,
- A nationwide sample of individuals should be taken, and
- Existing instrumentation should be used.

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\* These “tips” were prepared by the North American Association for Environmental Education under the Environmental Education and Training Partnership.